

JANE AUSTEN SOCIETY of NORTH AMERICA

VANCOUVER REGION NEWSLETTER No.35 August 1991

"THIS WILL PROVE A SPIRITED BEGINNING OF YOUR WINTER ENGAGEMENTS"

John Knightley was speaking of a snowstorm, but I don't expect such weather to interfere with our new season of meetings. Mark your calendar now, there may be no further notices.

- September 21: "The Army and the Navy in Jane Austen's Day" - Vivienne Brosnan.
October 19: "The Sotherton Episode in Mansfield Park" - Christine Liotta.
November 23: Members' reports from the Ottawa Conference.
December 14: Christmas in Jane Austen's Time: Readings and discussion, followed by a grand Christmas luncheon in the Regency style.

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ALL MEETINGS: St. Philips Fireside Room, 2737 West 27th Ave. (1 block west of Dunbar).
10:30 a.m. RSVP - Eileen Sutherland 988-0479

Pot-Luck Luncheon - New Rules: FINGER FOOD ONLY : Sandwiches (about twice as many as you can eat; cut in small pieces for sharing) - use your imagination: this may include mini-quiches, small pasties, sausage rolls, etc. Desserts: tarts, bar cookies, cake (cut up into individual portions).

To minimize the work in the kitchen, members will bring food ready to eat, and put it on trays in the kitchen. Coffee and tea will be served as usual - bring your own cup. A little work will still require volunteers - any help will be greatly appreciated.

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JANE AUSTEN'S USE OF THE WORD "TASTE" - Panel Discussion at the September Meeting.

Though Jane Austen criticizes the affectations in the contemporary fashions of taste, she accepts the principles from which those affectations arose. Pretensions to "taste" and "tenderness" are exposed, but true "taste" and "tenderness" are shown, always, to be signs of moral virtue. Hermione Lee, in Literature of the Romantic Period, (R.T.Davies & B.G.Beatty, ed.)

As a result of a discussion of the meaning of "Taste" in JA's novels at the July meeting, several members offered to do some research and report back with their comments and conclusions in September. Those volunteers are:

Mary Anderson (Persuasion), Eleanor Hill (Northanger Abbey), Irene Howard (Mansfield Park & Pride & Prejudice), Viviane McClelland (Sense & Sensibility), Keiko Parker (Emma), and Jill Sims (Juvenilia, Vol.I).

Any other members are welcome to take part in the discussion.

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JANE AUSTEN - Viviane McClelland.

"Experience country living at an elegant country manor hotel, town life in a bustling market town, and urban life during two days in London", suggested the brochure of this year's Travel Study Program from SFU, titled The English Countryside.

From April 20 to May 5, I was one of ten participants, studying the lives and works of three people who lived and wrote within thirty miles of each other, at the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries: novelist Jane Austen (1775-1817) at Chawton, social historian and author of Rural Rides, William Cobbett (1762-1835) at Farnham, and naturalist Gilbert White (1720-1793), author of The Natural History of Selborne, at Selborne.

Our first seven nights were spent at the Holbrook House Hotel, near the town of Wincanton in East Somerset. We all loved this hotel and hated to leave. It is set in fifteen acres overlooking the Blackmoor Vale and Dorset Downs. The resident owners made us feel that we were their personal guests. It was very easy to imagine ourselves back in Jane Austen's time visiting just such a house. My attic room was spacious and comfortable with a fireplace - very different from Fanny Price's quarters at Mansfield Park.

On the Wednesday following our Sunday arrival we went to Bath. Our first stop was the very crowded Pump Room for morning coffee. The room appeared to have been recently redecorated, although it was hard to tell as every square inch seemed to be filled with tables, chairs, and people. We had live music as well. If you can remember afternoon tea with music at Harrison Hot Springs 30 or 40 years ago, you will have the picture, (and the sound).

Coffee was followed by a walking tour conducted by an excellent local guide who focused on Jane Austen. We stopped at 13 Queen Square where Jane and her mother stayed with Edward and Elizabeth Knight and two of their children in May of 1799. Thanks to our guide we were able to enter this building, now solicitors' offices, and to go up the first flight of stairs to the landing which had a very large window. Jane's room, which we could not see, was said to have overlooked the square.

We passed as well 25 Gay Street, halfway up the hill leading to the Circus and not far from the Royal Crescent. Mrs. Austen and her two daughters moved into lodgings here at the end of March, 1805.

As a result of a conference at the recently redecorated Upper Assembly Rooms, we were denied access to the ballroom and the card room, but were allowed to enter the tearoom. (Some of us took a forbidden peak into the card room, which was empty). The rooms are beautiful. Again it was easy to picture Catherine Morland at a fashionable ball. Later on in Bond Street, we stood where Sir Walter Elliot might have stood when he "had counted eighty-seven women go by, one after another, without there being a tolerable face among them".

At the end of the walk and some "free" time, three of us walked rapidly across the Pulteney Bridge, through Laura Place where Lady Dalrymple had rooms, along Great Pulteney Street to No.4 Sydney Place, facing the Sydney Gardens. The Austens lived here from 1801 to 1804. We sat on a bench in the Gardens and ate our picnic lunches.

Thursday evening at the hotel, Brian Southam, author of several books on Jane Austen, and now chairman of the Jane Austen Society in England, gave us a most interesting talk on Persuasion.

On Friday we had a beautiful day in Lyme Regis and of course set out for a walk

on the Cobb which, according to Michelin, is:

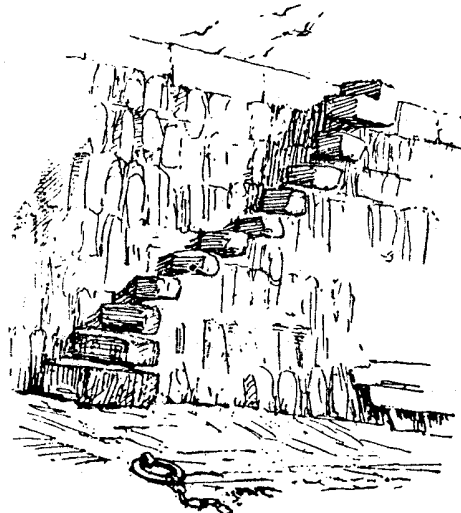
a breakwater, a curving 600' long stone jetty, with its back braced against the Atlantic swell and a small harbour on its lee side. It lies half a mile west of the town, built of boulders and rocks at the end of the Marine Parade.

We saw the famous steps from which Louisa Musgrove fell. The steps are such that I wouldn't care to walk either up or down them, let alone jump. Silly Louisa!

No.28 on the Marine Parade, (a possible model for Captain Harville's cottage), now a shop, bears a plaque which reads:

The house itself is one of a terrace of four cottages built close to the harbour in the 16th century and may, possibly, have been the cottage in which Jane Austen wrote her famous novel "Persuasion".

On Sunday we paid a reluctant farewell to Holbrook House, and set out at a very leisurely pace with several stops along the way, making just the sort of journey that Austen, Cobbett and White would have made, with a stop in a turnpike town for lunch and (in their day) a change of horses. It was nearly 6:00 p.m. when we arrived at the Swan Hotel in Alton in Hampshire where we were to spend five nights.



The Swan Hotel is an old, old building well camouflaged. The upstairs halls are narrow, winding passageways. Even very heavy carpeting cannot disguise the worn, uneven floors underneath.

The next day was entirely devoted to Jane Austen. After our morning seminar some of us walked to Chawton, a mere mile away. Our walk took us along streets that Jane Austen must have walked many, many times. In no time we were at the end of the High Street which is not particularly attractive - some old buildings, but most are contemporary and very ordinary - and into a quiet and attractive residential neighbourhood. The main road bypasses Chawton nowadays, which I consider a blessing. At Chawton we stopped for tea in "Cassandra's Cup" just across the street from Jane Austen's House, followed by a walk to St. Nicholas, the parish church, just down the hill from the Big House. It is a small, attractive church. Cassandra Austen and her mother are buried in the churchyard.

Back in the village, we joined the bus group for a drive to Steventon to see the site of the rectory where Jane Austen was born and lived for some 25 years. The building, of course, is long gone. We visited the Steventon Church of St. Nicholas of which Jane's father was rector and later her brother James. The latter is buried in the churchyard. It is a very lovely little church.

Lunch in Chawton and, at long last, a visit to the Jane Austen House. Both house and garden were much larger than I had expected. There were far too many people for a really enjoyable visit, although it is good to know that the museum does attract visitors. I was particularly struck by the very small table on which Jane is believed to have done her writing and by the quite thick lock of her hair which is kept in a case in the drawing room - a light brown rather than dark, as I had thought. There was a most entertaining exhibit in the upstairs passageway of illustrations for Pride

and Prejudice and Persuasion. I would like to visit this house again when there are fewer people.

Our final visit of the day was half a mile away to Chawton Manor House - the Big House - which had belonged to Edward Knight. It has been vacant for about three years and has very recently been leased for 150 years to a consortium of some sort for a million and a half pounds. The plan is to restore the house and grounds (and restoration is badly needed) and turn it into an exclusive golf and country club. The house is and has been for some time closed to the public, but our English tour guide had connections. We were not only admitted but had an extensive and informative tour of the fifty-room house by the caretaker.

The house is in very rough shape. It must have deteriorated even while still occupied. The last tenants consisted of three families. The rooms are laid out in a series of suites, making it quite possible for different families or different generations of the same family to live separately from one another. Our tour began in the basement which was low, dark, dirty, with many rooms, including a strong room. A spooky atmosphere - dandy spot for a "murder weekend", not that I would care to spend a night.

On the main floor and on the floors above there are many fireplaces, even in the servants' quarters on the top floor. Some panelled rooms. Many very handsome rooms with lovely vistas - handsome that is if one ignored the dirt, cobwebs and dry rot. There is a ghost - a nursemaid who haunts two or three of the rooms. The caretaker, a very pleasant young man, said he had never seen her but had heard footsteps. There are people who claim to have seen her.

There have been many alterations to the house over the years. The handsome main staircase is Victorian. Some of the windows have interesting stained glass with family crests and heraldic devices. There is a priest's hole, although to my way of thinking it would hold only a very small priest. Jane Austen is said to have written at least a part of one of her novels in one of the panelled rooms on a desk at one of the windows overlooking the grounds.

As far as I could tell, there were only four or five bathrooms in the entire building, hardly adequate by today's standards. I would not have cared to work in the kitchens even when they were in good condition. The library now contains plans and drawings of the proposed renovations together with samples of wallpaper and fabrics for drapes and so forth.

It is a shame that the house cannot be restored and kept as a family home, but I am sure the cost would be prohibitive, and it would likely not be the type of building which would justify such expenditure. Thinking back to Holbrook House, to the much grander Parnham, a beautifully restored manor house and gardens (the home of John and Jennie Makepeace, with contemporary furniture designed and crafted by Mr. Makepeace), and now to Chawton Manor, it is interesting to see just what can become of some of these very old mansions.

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ESSAY PRIZE

The University of B.C. has announced that this year's winner of the Jane Austen Society essay prize is Violet Mary Penistan. Members will remember Mrs. Penistan as one of the speakers at the Jane Austen Day in April, when her topic was "Jane Austen and Dr. Johnson". We sincerely congratulate Mrs. Penistan, and wish her much success and pleasure in her studies.

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JASNA VANCOUVER LIBRARY BOOKS:

Austen, Jane: Sanditon, The Watsons, Lady Susan, Miscellanea; Austen, J. & Another Lady: Sanditon; Byrde, Penelope: A Frivolous Distinction; Halperin, John: The Life of Jane Austen; Honan, Park: Authors' Lives; Jenkins, Elizabeth: Jane Austen; Kaye-Smith, Sheila & G.B.Stern: Speaking of Jane Austen; Laski, Marghanita: Jane Austen and her World; Lane, Maggie: Jane Austen's England; Lane, Maggie: A Charming Place; Mason Hurley, Joan: Our Own Particular Jane (2 copies); Modert, Jo (ed.): Jane Austen's Manuscript Letters in Facsimile; Morris, Ivor: Mr. Collins Considered; Smithers, David W.: Jane Austen in Kent; Tucker, George H.: A Goodly Heritage; Weldon, Fay: Letters to Alice; Whatman, Susanna: The Housekeeping Book of Susanna Whatman 1776-1800; Wilks, Brian: Jane Austen.

Jane Austen's Works, Chapman Edition (6 volumes) must be requested ahead of a meeting.

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NEW MEMBERS

We welcome new members who have joined JASNA Vancouver recently:

Blanche (Bonnie) Clarke: Vancouver	Freda Cullis: Vancouver
Darlene Foster: Delta	Helen Friedman: Vancouver
Janet Hicken: North Vancouver	Maureen Korman: White Rock
W. Peirs: Surrey	Frances Roger: Vancouver

We hope to meet these newcomers at our meetings in the coming season.

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LADY AUSTEN

Murray Wanamaker gave us a prompt reply to the query, "Who was Lady Austen?" in the last Newsletter:

Born Ann Richardson in 1735, the lady married Robert Austen in 1755. When his brother died in 1760, he succeeded to the baronetcy. For the next few years, Sir Robert and Lady Austen spent much of their time in France. Robert died in 1772, and Lady Austen returned to England.

William Cowper met Lady Austen in 1781, when she was living as a neighbour of his at Olney. She was a sister of the wife of the curate of Clifton, a nearby town. Lady Austen was converted by the Evangelicals, and this gave her something in common with Cowper. For two or three years they were very good friends in Olney.

For further information, Murray Wanamaker suggested two biographies: William Cowper by James King, and The Stricken Deer, by Lord David Cecil.

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More Information:

"There was a baronetcy in what was probably a branch of the same family, the Austens of Bexley. Created in 1660, it became extinct in 1772, the widow of the last baronet being that Lady Austen who was the friend of the poet Cowper".

Jane Austen: A Survey (1929) Clara Linklater Thomson.

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SUSAN FERRIER: SUBCONSCIOUS REBEL - E. Sutherland

Although her first novel was not published until after Jane Austen's death, Susan Ferrier was only a few years younger and the two writers had much in common. A biographer, Mary Cullinan, wrote of Ferrier as:

a complex, contradictory character... A social satirist who yet clung closely to the conservative precepts of her society and church, Susan Ferrier never completely reconciled the divergent elements of her personality. The artistic results of these contradictions are manifested in recurring thematic patterns, many of which reveal an ambivalence about the roles and lives of women and the value of fiction itself... Beneath the familiar tales of heroines finding happiness with gentlemen of fortune are disquieting scenes and images that belie [the author's] faith in traditional values and accepted behavior. Unconsciously, Ferrier created works that question the established social order...



Almost the same could be said about Jane Austen.

Susan Ferrier (1782-1854) was the youngest in a well-to-do family in Edinburgh, and lived the life of a middle-class young woman of the time. She spent a year or two in an infant school, but otherwise was educated at home: to read and do simple arithmetic, and the usual "accomplishments" expected of young ladies - drawing, music, needlework. Her mother died when she was in her early teens, and as her older sisters married and left home she was expected to take over more and more of the household management.

There was no open rebellion, but the heroines of her novels are shown trapped in the boredom and tedium of domestic and social life. In a letter to a friend, Ferrier wrote: *I am busied in...japanning old boxes, varnishing new ones, darning velvet...and by way of pastime, I play whist every night to the very death with all the lusty dowagers and musty mousers in the parlour...* Bitterness comes through only seldom; her sense of humour allowed her to find interest in all she saw and met. The eccentricities of speech and dress she noticed at the opera, theatre, balls or assembly rooms appeared in characters in her novels years later.

Ferrier's witty and satiric letters were the delight of her friends. When her duty and responsibility for looking after her father constrained her to remain at home, she put this sharpness and humour into her writing. In 1809 she and a friend decided to collaborate in writing a novel: the joint authorship was not a success. The friend preferred plots which were "horrible and astonishing", Ferrier developed absurd situations and wickedly comic descriptions of fashionable life. The novel took shape along Ferrier's lines, but her friend contributed enthusiasm, support and perceptive criticism.

The first novel, Marriage, was published anonymously in 1818, and Ferrier took special pains to remain unknown. The story is a contrast between rural Scottish life and English society: unfortunate or failed marriages - a runaway marriage for love and a calculated marriage for money, among them - a succession of comic characters, and the "serious" female character who proves the ideal and the moral of the story. It is the humour that holds the scanty plot together. Ferrier is the first woman to create a Scottish novel of manners from a woman's point of view. She is concerned with the mindless lives of useless and bored women in the different spheres in which they move. The characters are predictable; their foibles and flaws are exposed with an acuteness that leaves no room for sympathy or pity. On the other hand, these satiric caricatures are balanced by the virtues of those women who develop ways to cope with the limitations of their lives.

Susan Ferrier was not comfortable with her own wit and creativity. Her satiric portraits of society females are overlaid with sentiment and morality. The heroines are pious, virtuous and obedient; they ultimately attain wealthy, loving and titled husbands. Undercutting this romantic plot, however, are tales of women who are emotionally, intellectually and morally deficient. This subtle dichotomy and covert rebellion against society may have been completely subconscious - Ferrier's letters and memoirs are those of a woman who wanted to write "moral" novels, not subversive ones.

Education is the clue to the development of character. Of the twin girls in Marriage, one is brought up by her selfish and irresponsible mother in London, "educated for the sole purpose of forming a brilliant establishment, of catching the eye, and captivating the senses". The other is raised on a remote small estate in Scotland, taught to be occupied and as useful as possible within the limited sphere of a woman's life, "practising the quiet virtues of patience, and fortitude, and self-denial, and unostentatiously sacrificing her own wishes to promote the comfort of others".

Marriage became an immediate success. Six years later The Inheritance was published, structurally better but lacking the spontaneity of the earlier work. Ferrier's third novel, Destiny, is even more serious, concerned with morality and death.

Literary success did not change Ferrier's quiet way of life. She developed a close friendship with Sir Walter Scott, who helped her in negotiations with publishers. She very seldom left home, restricted by her feeling of duty in keeping her infirm father company. By the time of his death, her health was poor and her eyesight failing. She was known in Edinburgh literary society, however, and many visitors wanted to meet the author of these three books which had become classics. Ferrier gave up writing and in her last years turned more and more to religion as a support. Mary Cullinan summed up Ferrier's life:

The only outlet for her energy and her intelligence had been her writing, and that gift had somehow eluded her after a few rich years.

[Further reading - Susan Ferrier: Mary Cullinan.]

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QUOTATION OF THE MONTH

"We must not expect comfort from Miss Austen. We go to her to be alerted and braced". Q.D.Leavis:Collected Essays.

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READING - OR READING INTO - JANE AUSTEN

In an article about rape in Time, June 3, 1991, appeared this sentence:

Higher up the cultural food chain, young people can read of date rape in Homer or Jane Austen, watch it in Don Giovanni or Rigoletto.

Vivian Hall, of southern California, wrote to Time, asking for an explanation of such an extraordinary claim. The answer she received, in part, said:

We're sorry you were disappointed by our reference to Jane Austen: it was made while recalling instances where female characters in literature might be said to express a certain willingness or desire to be overpowered by a male figure (in this instance, our writer was thinking of the close of Pride and Prejudice), and not as an example of literal rape, as the sentence may have made it seem...

Can anyone suggest any sentence at the end of P&P which would give substance to this idea? even metaphorically?

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NEWS FROM ABROAD - Jocelyn Cass.

"As you suggested, I am sending some notes on my doings. We crossed from Cherbourg to Portsmouth on P&O, (I recommend it. Not crowded) and spent 2 nights looking at High St., and the mean streets off it, the ruins of the Garrison Chapel and going over the Victory and the Mary Rose. After visiting the Roman excavation at Fishbourne and lunching in Chichester, we spent 2 nights in Winchester, with a visit to Chawton. We are now in a funny little hotel (in Deddington) which used to be a coaching inn, built in about 1580, with a tapestry hanging in the stairway which I think is as old as the house. No one knows anything about it. The tapestry, like the building, just "came down in the family". Kindest regards to all. (The last Persuasions was very useful in Portsmouth!)"

Later:

"We are well settled in. Old Kidlington [Oxfordshire] is very attractively built in Cotswold stone, and we have the top floor of a 3 storey house, with wavy floors and axe-cut beams. We like the space and air, and our chintz and white walls and black beams, but will probably need furcoats in the winter as the central heating RISES to 60°F we are told.

"My reader's ticket to Bodley was renewed without fuss but times are a-changing. Bodley now has a ticket with a photo and demands a fee! Staffing and services have been severely cut during the Thatcher years. It sometimes takes 3 weeks for a book which has been used to get back to its rightful place in the stacks.

"Best wishes to JASNA Vancouver. We plan to do a Steventon walk soon."

[Jocelyn sent some pictures of Portsmouth - see them at the next meeting].

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MISQUOTATION - Mrs. Mary Bennett, Toronto.

I talk of nothing but Jane Fairfax...Such talents as hers must not be suffered to remain unknown. I dare say you have heard those charming lines of the poet -

*Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its fragrance on the desert air.*

As a poetry lover, I have always wondered if Jane Austen deliberately made Mrs. Elton misquote Thomas Gray (ch.33). I have a very "ill opinion" of people who misquote the classics, and isn't this just what the awful Augusta would do!

The line is, of course: "And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

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[Ed.note: This is an intriguing idea, but Chapman does not agree. In the notes to his edition of Emma, he points out that the misquotation was not intentional, as the same word "fragrance" appears in Northanger Abbey (p.15) where Jane Austen describes what Catherine has learned from her early reading. Chapman's note goes on to say, "Miss Austen was perhaps misled by Cowper, who makes the same mistake (Hayley's Life, 1803, Vol.1, p.39)." This is in a letter to his friend Joseph Hill, Oct.25, 1765, about finding new and invaluable friends in unexpected places. Cowper himself, in another connection, wrote to a friend, "Horace says somewhere, though I may quote it amiss, for I have a terrible memory..."]

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"COME AND EAT MY STRAWBERRIES"

A delightful "strawberry picnic" and luncheon was held in July, with 27 members present. Although the amenities of Donwell Abbey were lacking, and members did not emulate the Highbury party by picking their own fruit, the berries came "fresh from the farm" in Richmond. Entertainment was provided by readings from various sources from nursery rhymes to contemporary authors, and informal discussion ranged just as widely.

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ANTHONY TROLLOPE ON "EMMA" (1864):

"The story shows wonderful knowledge of the female character, and is severe on the little foibles of woman with a severity which no man would dare to use. Emma, the heroine, is treated mercilessly. In every passage of the book, she is in fault for some folly, some vanity, some ignorance, - or indeed some meanness." (NCF IV, 1950)

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PLEASING PLAGUE

"I am quite determined to marry Fanny Price..." "When did you begin to think seriously about her?" Nothing could be more impossible than to answer such a question, though nothing be more agreeable than to have it asked. "How the pleasing plague had stolen on him' he could not say..."

Ted McCarthy, of St. John's, Newfoundland (our only Newfoundland member!) found the source of Jane Austen's quotation which Henry Crawford uses, speaking to his sister Mary:

THE JE NE SCAI QUOI

A SONG.

I.

YES, I'm in love, I feel it now,
And CÆLIA has undone me;
And yet I'll swear I can't tell how
The pleasing plague stole on me.

II.

'Tis not her face that love creates,
For there no graces revel;
'Tis not her shape, for there the fates
Have rather been uncivil.

III.

'Tis not her air, for sure in that
There's nothing more than common:
And all her sense is only chat
Like any other woman.

IV.

Her voice, her touch might give th' alarm—
'Twas both perhaps, or neither;
In short, 'twas that provoking charm
Of CÆLIA altogether.

THE JE NE SCAI QUOI. The title means "the I don't know what." The phrase was often used to denote the "indefinable something" that made an object, often a work of art, significant for the imagination or the emotions. The text is from Dodsley's *A Collection of Poems* (3 vols., 1748).

William Whitehead

1715-1785

[Ed.note: Jane Austen owned a copy of Dodsley's Poems, which was sold when the family moved to Bath. She didn't seem to value it much. In a letter to Cassandra, May 21, 1801, she commented: "Ten shillings for Dodsley's Poems however please me to the quick, & I do not care how often I sell them for as much. When Mrs. Bramston has read them through I will sell them again..."]

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IMPORTANT! BOOK MISSING!

One of our library books - the beautiful Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics - has not been seen in our JA library for some time. Will the member who has it out please return it at the next meeting, or get in touch with me to arrange for it to be brought back into the fold.

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This Newsletter, the publication of the Vancouver Region of the Jane Austen Society of North America, comes out four times a year: February, May, August and November. All submissions on the subject of Jane Austen, her life, her works and her times, are welcome. Mail to the Editor: Eileen Sutherland, 4169 Lions Ave., North Vancouver, B.C. V7R 3S2. Price to non-members: \$4.00 per year.